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TAGS: PREL PGOV PBTS MO AL

SUBJECT: MOROCCAN PLANS FOR S MEETING NEXT WEEK ON THE
WESTERN SAHARA

REF: STATE 163811

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In response to Ambassador,s urging that the proposed delegation bring a concrete autonomy plan to Washington, MFA Minister Delegate Fassi Fihri indicated they would not be able to present a written draft plan. There are still many complex internal issues to be resolved, so they are unable now to present a plan that is supported by CORCAS, political parties and the government ministries, although the King has mandated one be ready by next spring. The delegation, including 6 ministers, half from the major coalition parties, would affirm their commitment to developing a plan, note progress so far, and some internal differences, and provide a notional timeline: a CORCAS Report to the King at the end of the year, 2-3 months to reconcile it with the parties, positions, and a concrete proposal by April. He mentioned the Polisario only to criticize its latest insistence on the Baker plan. While appreciating this readout of their intentions, Ambassador reiterated that without more concrete commitments it was unclear how a ministerial meeting now would advance the resolution of the Saharan issue. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador called on MFA Minister Delegate Taib Fassi Fihri, the King,s Man in the MFA, on October 6, to flesh out Moroccan goals for proposed meeting(s) next week with Secretary Rice, NSA Hadley and others on the Western Sahara. Ambassador noted that a meeting with the Secretary had been requested, but that she was only staying in Washington briefly at the time of the proposed visit and her calendar was already full. Nonetheless, we are trying to accommodate their request and would try to respond as soon as possible. He stressed however that any meeting would need to be productive. As noted in our demarche, we are prepared to publicly support a well-defined realistic autonomy plan that could be accepted by the full spectrum of Sahrawis. Washington was eager to see a draft plan -- a rehash of familiar reasons why this was difficult could hardly be seen as a ministerial-level discussion. .

¶3. (C) Fassi Fihri said there may have been some misunderstanding of the purpose of the trip. There was not now a written plan. Morocco had already made significant strides towards a plan. Internally the views of three key groups: government ministries; Sahrawis, through CORCAS, the main political parties, who had been drawn into the process for the first time. CORCAS had just been in Washington. Its internal consultations were not complete, but CORCAS Chairman Kalihenna Ould Er Rachid was already pushing for a robust autonomy, beyond what the parties were ready to accept. The

party leaders, ministers representing the three government coalition parties, were a key component of the present delegation, to show their commitment to the process and how their views differed from those of CORCAS. Some parties were opposed to the idea of a Sahrawi legislature with law-making powers. Also, he hinted, having party leaders in a session with the Secretary would enhance the pressure on them to be flexible on developing a common draft the King could approve and to support his proposed timeline.

¶4. (C) The Minister-Delegate insisted that the King had mandated that a plan be produced next spring (Note: about a year after the King's kick-off speech.). Fassi Fihri averred he had laid out this timetable in his meetings in Washington last April, but was prepared now to be more specific about the timeline. Kalihenna would submit the CORCAS comments formally to the monarch in the November-December timeframe, it would take two or three months for the government to reconcile the currently widely divergent positions between the CORCAS and some of the parties. There would be &about a month⁸ of subsequent government processing time and Morocco would be able to deploy the plan internationally and with the public. He stated categorically that Morocco will present its plan then, not disputing the Ambassador's efforts to pin this down to early April, but seemed to waffle at the idea this might be a &government commitment.⁸ He suggested that the King intended to subsequently move to implement the plan so that the other side would have to respond not just to a plan but to a process.

¶5. (C) Fassi Fihri offered almost no details on what the plan might contain other than to say that it would provide for local government and local taxation and make some provision of sharing natural resource revenues. On this, and

speaking more generally he referred to the U.S. federal model. (Comment: Unclear how serious a reflection this was of their thinking, but it suggests rather less autonomy than other models we know the Moroccans have considered, such as Spain, Portuguese Madeira, etc. He appeared to imply this was somewhat less &generous⁸ than the December 2003 proposal to Baker, due to &changed circumstances⁸ in the Sahara.)

¶6. (C) Fassi Fihri made no mention of any plans to consult or even communicate with the Polisario, other than to observe that they had just recently commented for the first time on the Moroccan autonomy proposal of 2003, rejecting it entirely in favor of the Baker plan. He also criticized the Algerian presentation to the UNGA (Decolonization Committee) as utterly inflexible on that score. He also said one feature of their thinking on the plan would have the Saharan self governing mechanism tilted slightly in favor of the Rguibat tribe, the tribe of most of the Polisario to attract their interest (Note: coincidentally it is also the tribe of Kalihenna). He noted that balancing the tribal differences in Sahrawi are part of the complications slowing down the Moroccan deliberations.

¶7. (C) Fassi Fihri also made no direct mention of MINURSO. He regretted that on this issue the UN international calendar was not consonant with the Moroccan political calendar. (Comment: Making clear that the latter took priority for the kingdom.) He separately asked &what if war breaks out in the region?⁸

¶8. (C) Comment: It appears the Moroccans do not have enough new to say about their plans for autonomy commensurate with a six-minister delegation. We are also disappointed that they have not responded to our offer to broker talks with the Polisario, even if the other side looks incalcitrant. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the Moroccans are continuing to work on autonomy, perhaps with a view to putting into place a mechanism that would be totally a product of the palace. MOROCCAN PLANS FOR S MEETING NEXT WEEK ON THE WESTERN SAHARA

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